

**STUDY ON THE ROLE OF STREETSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS
IN THE URBAN SPACES
OF THE CITY OF COLOMBO**

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED AS SUBJECT
TO THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
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IN ARCHITECTURE

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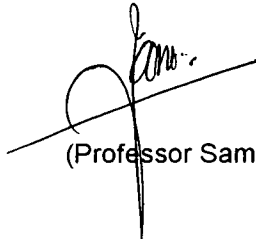
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ABSTRACT

The daily life routine in a city creates an essential bond between man and his environment, as the user becomes a part of that context.

Identifying the environment is indispensable for human existence. The unique identity and understanding of a place makes the user more comfortable. If the identity and character itself is strong and rigid, the place becomes more valuable to the user and the city experience will become meaningful and delightful.

Urban spaces consist of streetscapes. They are urban access corridors that bear different characteristics. These characteristics form the unique identity of the urban space. Thus identifying the street characteristics improve human existence as it helps to create habitable human environments.

Thus, preservation and maintenance of the unique character of streetscapes becomes a vital need in order to protect the spirit of the place since these strong characters determine a rigid environmental image. Thus, this research study was an attempt of identifying these extreme ambiances of streetscape characteristics and their generating factors that finally result in a strong and meaningful built setting.

The study is basically concentrates on the major character generating factors of streetscapes such as usage, activity patterns, architectural features, built fabrics and symbolic features, etc which occur according to the cultural, functional, contextual, religious, and historical effects. In addition, understanding the responsiveness of the setting such as its permeability, legibility and variety, etc is analyzed to comprehend the final overriding character of the setting.

The initial part of this study deals with the historical development and formation of streetscape characters in Colombo. Secondly, the present situation of the streetscapes of urban contexts, which link major townscapes of Colombo are observed and studied. Finally, these connections and establishments are analyzed through a theoretical basis with a concluding discussion and suggestions for the creation of better urban streetscapes.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Architecture has a very close relationship with space, and an architect has to arrange space in a meaningful manner. Thus, the essence of architecture is making mankind more comfortable by providing spaces that are communicable while being adaptable, fulfilling practical needs in an existential dimension.

The word "urban" means living in city or town. It is described in the American Heritage dictionary as 'constituting a city'.

A city is a collection of places, various kinds of environments where humans live, begin their lives and where they gain their basic needs. It reflects the quality and power of the inhabitants. It can be said that the urban space consists of inhabited streetscapes bearing different characteristics. Many factors contribute in creating these diverse environments and characteristics in an urban setting. Architectural features, activity pattern, and the responsiveness of the setting such as legibility, permeability, Variety, etc are some major factors that help to form the character of an urban setting. These factors have a strong impact in developing streetscape characteristics, which finally bring out a unique quality while giving an identity and image to a city.

Streetscapes include natural and man-made elements, with various activities in rhythmic patterns, forming relationships to create a sense of liveliness.

The daily life routine in a city creates an essential bond between the man and his environment. The user becomes a part of that space and if its character itself is strong and rigid, the place becomes more valuable to the users. Therefore, the preservation of the unique character of streetscapes becomes a vital need to protect the spirit of the place since these strong characters determine a rigid environmental image. Thus, this research study was an attempt to identify these extreme ambiances of streetscape characteristics and their generating factors that finally result in a strong and meaningful built setting.

Criticality of the Observations and the Possible Causes

Early cities and urban built environments, which were favorable for human habitation, had strong characters that were unique to them. These characters brought an identity and image to the cities. Rapid development of the cities took place after the modern movement and industrial revolution. The modern movement caused a destructive break in the evolution of architecture in most cities. People embraced modern movement in a very critical manner. This has done irreparable damage to the hearts of many urban centers and destroyed the quality of the city fabric, the uniqueness of the urban built environment and connections between elements.

It also created unfavorable environments for human habitation along with numerous other negative effects on city dwellers.

Colombo is the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, which had an important physical setting. However, very little places of townscapes still can be seen with their real value that must be retained for the sense of identity.

The urban form of the city has developed as a response to its proximity to the sea. The unplanned and haphazard evolution was the cause in creating areas of confusion and abandonment. There are huge extents of lands between neighborhoods that are not properly utilized, creating lost spaces and diminishing the quality of the city. New buildings are erected without considering the neighborhoods, relationships, and historical values of the streetscapes of the city, leading to a loss of the physical composition of the urban entity. The relationships of the existing setting have not been identified in most cases.

The built fabric of the city, that needs to respond to its surroundings, is architecturally ignored in this most critical situation. In various portions of the city its character is destroyed. Thus, the experience of moving along a city has become an unpleasant experience because the unified character has been destroyed. Important places cannot be distinguished, and all buildings have tried to become objects. Very little places of townscapes exist with their real value retaining the sense of identity. Thus, making harmonized townscapes has become a critical thing to consider.



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Intention of the Study

Streetscapes of a city bring a specific character to the city that change frequently due to various factors. Street grows and changes continuously. They facilitate many activities within the city. Therefore the aim was to research the current situation and to study what has happened to the inherent qualities or the existing characteristics of townscapes of the city of Colombo.

The study is based on streetscapes in the urban setting and its aim was to identify the significant qualities and characteristics of townscapes, which can be developed and maintained when erecting new buildings, to form a meaningful city that would contain a collection of harmonized urban spaces making the city a functionally meaningful and aesthetically delightful place to live in.

Finally the intention was to promote a contextualized approach to the design of buildings in the urban environment and provide a philosophical background and practical guidance to this approach.

It is also meant to support the development of an architectural theme that arises according to the demands of contextual, functional, cultural, political and historical needs rather than spreading and reflecting modernism each and every space, destroying its architectural character.

Scope and Limitations

Study will focus on the historical formation of the urban character of the city of Colombo. Significant townscapes, its urban space, building morphology and the zoning of activities will be analyzed to evolve its inherent meaning and hence to identify development patterns in the streetscapes of the city of Colombo.

The study is a visual approach and is consciously restricted to the direct examples of the city of Colombo to find out how people use the streetscapes and what would weaken the identity and spirit of place in the effort of creating a richer urban life.

Methodology

This research will be a case study based approach to analyze practical situations of streetscapes in the city of Colombo, identifying historical situations of the urban space of Colombo and the existing nature of the built fabric. This will focus on the identification of architectural features and activity patterns of an urban contexts, responsiveness of the setting, symbolic features, streets patterns, etc which help to form special characters in specific areas.

This research will be focused on the selected streetscapes of different areas such as commercial, public, semi public, cultural, recreational, and residential zones in an analytical manner. It will study the layout patterns, visual facts of building facades, architectural details, building fabric, proportion, skyline, texture, etc.

The first chapter summerises the historical development and its formation of Colombo city and the case study of streetscape characters in the second chapter. The observations of these spatial experiences will be analyzed in the third chapter. This will bring out a comparative analysis in a theoretical basis. The analysis will be based on the design concepts such as street patterns, fabric and object, views & vistas, colours & textures, vegetation, detailing & materials, building line & street line, symbolic characteristics, features of pathways, nodes, landmarks, edges & districts and also the facts that help to create responsive environments such as legibility, permeability & variety, etc.

The fourth chapter ends the dissertation with a concluding discussion and suggestions.